LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Biblical Leadership Old Testament Theme Report

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Biblical Foundations of Leadership

by

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**Contents**

Introduction 1

**Leadership Themes from Moses and Jethro** 2

**Leadership Themes from the Judges** 3

**Leadership Themes from Proverbs** 4

**Leadership Themes from Ecclesiastes** 5

**Leadership Themes from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel** 6

Conclusion 7

Bibliography 9

**Introduction**

The writers who contributed to the book *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader* collaborated to analyze books of the Bible and to extract leadership truths that have the singular characteristic of having come from the inspired Word of God. [[1]](#footnote-2) This distinction is the guiding principle behind the information that the writers convey as they highlight the leadership lessons that are provided throughout Scripture.

The book is composed of writings from thirty-four contributing authors, some of whom write on different topics. The first nineteen chapters focus upon leadership concepts that can be gleaned from the Old Testament. The following fourteen chapters examine the books of the New Testament for leadership content. The epilogue reminds the reader that Christian leadership is a subset in the area of knowledge on leadership. [[2]](#footnote-3) The paradigms differ from worldly methods, and the goals of Christian leadership are often at odds with the practice of secular leadership. The writers challenge the reader to be a contributor to the on-going discussion of how to communicate Christian leadership to those of this generation and those in the future.

This paper will review selected topics chosen from the nineteen chapters that covered the books of the Old Testament. Specifically, summaries will be provided on the leadership concepts evidenced by Moses and Jethro’s interactions, the examples provided by the Judges of Israel, the wisdom about leadership conveyed in the book of Proverbs, the realistic advice given in the book of Ecclesiastes, and the examples of righteous leadership provided by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The paper will give an explanation of why these themes are important to this writer and to my ministry.

**Leadership Themes from Moses and Jethro**

Moses is considered to be one of the patriarchs of the Christian and Jewish faiths. His accomplishments have inspired many to move forward to strive for amazing results when faced with overwhelming opposition. Moses is admired partly because he voiced his fears and self-doubts when he was facing the Lord being commissioned to lead the nation of Israel out from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. His concerns were valid, but God assured Him that the Lord would win the battles and Moses just had to be faithful to engage with the task. He did prove faithful and became the leader of what is estimated to be millions of Israelites as they left Egypt as a free people.

The scope of his duties quickly led to Moses becoming overwhelmed with the amount of time it took to serve this many people. The authors relayed how Moses’ father-in-law gave him timely advice that helped him overcome this challenge. Jethro suggested that Moses could serve the people better if he delegated duties to others. This would allow a leadership structure that could give timely direction to those who needed help, rather than awaiting an audience with Moses. Moses saw the wisdom in this advice and put the plan into motions.

This initiation of an action plan demonstrated several leadership concepts. First, Moses gave evidence of an attitude of humility.[[3]](#footnote-4)  He was willing to acknowledge a better plan was needed and that others could be served by someone besides himself. Next, Moses showed he was willing to accept wisdom from any source. It is assumed that Jethro was not a God-fearer, but was a priest to another god. Moses did not discount his voice simply because Jethro was not from his inner circle. Another key concept shown was that Moses was able to recognize that he was not trained as a judge nor was he familiar with the lifestyles of the Israelites. By recognizing his lack of ability, Moses was able to empower others who were more skillful to handle the needed tasks. Moses rightly understood his limitations and was always ready to cry out to God for solutions that he did not have to power to accomplish himself. Moses humility kept him from assuming the miracles were dependent upon himself, and rightly focused the honor on the Lord.[[4]](#footnote-5)

It is vital that I learn these lessons as I attempt to lead people within the church. I must remain confident that the tasks that I have been given by God will be accomplished by God. I am invited to stand close by as He works. He will supply the right resources in the right season. He expects me to be a wise manager and to put those resources to work for maximum impact. He provides people with training and motivation to help with service in the Kingdom. I must be humble enough to empower and delegate to others rather than seeking to solve all problems myself.

**Leadership Concepts from the Book of Judges**

The book of Judges documents the nation of Israel after Joshua dies and the nation begins to operate without a clearly defined leader. The Israelites had settled into the Promised Land and surrounding areas. Their experience was not what God had intended. They had stopped short of clearing out the Canaanite people from the region as God had directed. They settled in comfortably with the local people and began to intermarry with these residents. This was in direct violation of what God had directed them to do as His chosen people.[[5]](#footnote-6) This pattern became a recurring behavior of the Israelite people. They chose compromise rather than obedience to God’s directives. God removed His protection from them so that they could realize their need for Him in their lives and the wisdom of obeying His directives. After the people began to be oppressed by their enemies, they would cry out to God and He would raise up a Judge to lead them away from being dominated by their enemies toward peace for themselves through God’s intervention in battle. The people would become complacent again as another generation grew to adulthood. God would remove His favor and the cycle of rescue through a new Judge would repeat. The people had a pattern of forgetting the value of God’s ways and delighting themselves in the customs of the people around them. They indulged themselves in comfort and gratification of their desires, and refused to honor God with their obedience and worship. They came to value the importance of family and proper treatment of others who were under their control. They chose their own wisdom rather than God’s wisdom.[[6]](#footnote-7)

My hope is that I can discipline myself to remain faithful as a leader and seek to show others the importance of faithfulness to the Lord. The importance of training up the next generation falls to the adult believers who must be taught the principle that their legacy can be removed by not training up the next generation to fear and honor the Lord with their faithfulness and love.

**Leadership Themes from Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs reminds readers that God establishes leaders. The writer describes how a leader should be a person who rules wisely by administering justice. This involves speaking for the powerless, defending the rights of the poor and the needy. The ruler also should exhibit a determination to value ethical values.[[7]](#footnote-8) Other proverbs speak to how a good leader values those with pure hearts. They respect and seek to advance those who speak truthfully at all times. The proverbs continue to describe leaders as those who are able to discern people’s character. The leader should encourage what is good and stand against what is wrong. Good leaders do not exploit their positions for personal gain, and they avoid lustful ways and avoid drunkenness.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The book of Proverbs gives counsel on many areas of life. These truths will assist me as I seek to serve others. The admonitions provide a good playbook of values that need to be adhered to in the life of a leader. The reminder to encourage what is good can appear to be obvious. The concerns of each day can give a leader the sense that they have to choose any tactic to overcome obstacles. These truths remind us that we have to choose the values that God admires and allow Him to provide the winning impact for His Kingdom. My role is to live an upright life in the eyes of the Lord and do my best to serve His people.

**Leadership Themes from Ecclesiastes**

The reader of the book of Ecclesiastes is presented with the idea that almost every action in life is meaningless.[[9]](#footnote-10)  The key to this concept is that life is meaningless when one lives apart from God. The book is generally considered to be the observations of Solomon, who was considered to be the wisest man who has lived. He asked God for wisdom and God granted his request. His life as a leader began well as He honored God and lived uprightly. Over time, he repeatedly married foreign wives and they ultimately turned his heart away from God. Even though he had great wisdom, his choices led him away from honoring God and he sought to live according to his own wishes. The writer, Daniel Estes, points out that the last paragraphs of the book of Ecclesiastes introduces another voice who provides a counterpoint to the words of Solomon. This voice explains that a wise leader lives above the sun rather than under the sun. Life gains meaning when lived in fellowship with God, yet leaders should expect adversity in a fallen world.[[10]](#footnote-11)

My desire is to remain focused on living a life that is spent following God’s direction for my life. The book of Ecclesiastes is a stark reminder that even with the best possible mind and amazing wealth is not of the same value as living a life that is approved by God. I will seek to remain confident in the Lord even when facing obstacles. This Scripture reminds me that life will always have trials, but God has promised to be active in my life and to guide me each day. I will strive to live a self-disciplined life and remain in His Word so that I can be refreshed with the truths that are contained there.

**Leadership Themes from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel**

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all condemned the leaders of Israel and Judah for their overwhelming pride that caused them to commit the sin of attempting to consider themselves like God.[[11]](#footnote-12) The kings of the other nations around the kingdoms of Israel and Judah considered themselves to be gods, not recognizing that they were merely tools in God’s hands. These leaders misplaced their trust in human resources and their own wisdom. The prophets sought to encourage their leaders to be wise and submit to the authority of God’s commands. This would demonstrate that they saw the superiority of divine wisdom to human wisdom. It also demonstrates how they consider righteousness as a key value in their lives.[[12]](#footnote-13)

These books of the Bible also highlight that wise leaders build their lives upon God’s Word. Sadly, the people of Judah refused to be faithful to God. They chose to be faithless, rebellious, and have stubborn hearts. The leaders lost their ability to properly love others and felt no constraint to love others. Those leaders had lost their belief that God could provide for them and felt that they must take whatever action was necessary to get what they needed.

I wish to remain convinced that all that I need comes from the Lord. The unbelief the leaders exhibited is very typical of godless men. As a minister of the Lord, it is my desire to always remain faithful to the Lord and to remain confident in His ability to complete all things according to His will.

**Conclusion**

The themes that are visible in the Old Testament are full of meaningful information to leaders who take the time to examine the stories for leadership principles. There are many truths in these Scriptures, but they consistently speak to the need for a leader to choose to be a person who seeks a relationship with the Lord. God demonstrates His desire for relationship with the leaders He establishes. He also demonstrates His love for His people in that He has provided a leader to serve them. The leaders are wise if they remain humble, and recognize that God is always in control, even when the leaders feel overwhelmed by chaotic events. This confidence in the sovereignty of God allows the leaders to understand themselves better and to quickly turn to God for answers instead of relying upon their own wisdom.

Another key aspect of biblical leadership is to develop the mindset of doing good. By caring for those they lead, many decisions of the leader become foregone conclusions. Unethical and harmful plans are automatically discounted and set aside. The leader’s actions inspire the people to remain faithful to God and to seek relationship with Him. A leader’s influence impacts those he currently leads and the generations that follow. Good leaders accept the responsibility to raise up good leaders who continue their legacy of service to others and provide a Godly influence upon others.

As a minister, it is my responsibility to be aware of the challenges of leadership and to adopt the “best practices” as described and demonstrated in Scripture. I must have an intimate relationship with God, submit myself to His authority, and put into practice the wisdom that He provides. These leadership themes within the Old Testament will serves as useful paradigms to aid me as I seek to serve others well with a pure heart.

**Bibliography**

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1. Benjamin Forrest and Chet Roden. *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, 2017, page 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid., 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid., 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ibid., 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid., 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ibid., 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid., 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibid., 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ibid., 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibid., 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Ibid., 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Ibid., 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)